

Minutes
Rural Virginia Action Committee Meeting
Board of Directors of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership
September 28, 2022
2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:35 p.m. by Chair Rick Harrell, who noted that a quorum was present.

Members present: Chair Rick Harrell, Carrie Chenery, Stephen Edwards, and Secretary Caren Merrick

Members absent: Nancy Agee

Other Board Members: Mimi Coles, John Hewa, Pace Lochte, Nick Rush, and Will Sessoms

VEDP staff present: Lindsay Barker, Vince Barnett, Star Cranston, Nicole David, David Devan, Jason El Koubi, Stephanie Florie, Jennifer Garrett, Stephen Hartka, Lori Melancon, and Lisa Wallmeyer

VEDP staff (virtual): Christy Morton

Guests present: Renee Haltom, Jason Powell, and Wyatt Toehlke

Public Comment Period

Chair Harrell asked if there were any members of the public who wished to make a comment. There were none.

Approval of Minutes for June 22, 2022

Chair Harrell asked for approval of the minutes from the June 22, 2022 Committee meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Chenery and seconded by Mr. Edwards; the minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

Opportunities for Improving Rural Outcomes

Chair Harrell introduced Renee Haltom, Vice President and Regional Executive with the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond

Ms. Haltom provided details about her background and her work. She shared that the Federal Reserve thinks a lot about rural Virginia. She said their work is informed with data and boots on the ground. She explained that they view things through a different lens by exploring the intersection of economic development and community development.

Ms. Haltom spoke about the issue of rural communities losing population. She explained that there was somewhat of a reversal in 2020-2021 as people were leaving the metro areas during the pandemic and relocating to rural areas. She stated that cultures have shifted, and the labor market, in part, will determine if this change sticks.

Ms. Haltom shared information about employment to population ratio, labor force participation, and what keeps workers on the sidelines.

Ms. Haltom spoke about childcare deserts, defined as areas where there are three or more kids under the age of five for every one licensed childcare spot. She said this reality could be keeping parents, particularly mothers, from working, and Covid only made it worse.

Ms. Haltom highlighted other issues impacting workers in rural areas, including housing costs and transportation expenses.

Ms. Haltom explained the deep correlation between health and labor force participation. She stated that the disability rates are higher in rural areas, which keeps people out of work. She added that the shortage of healthcare workers contributes to the closure of rural hospitals.

Ms. Haltom spoke about broadband and said it is encouraging that money is now available to address the issue.

Ms. Haltom said that these problems facing the rural areas would only be solved when there is more coordination of resources.

Ms. Haltom highlighted rural assets, including community colleges, 4-year universities, anchor institutions/development hubs, and engaged leaders who want to get things done.

Ms. Haltom spoke about “success story” communities and how outsiders can help. She said the best way to offer support is to help coordinate resources and create scale.

Ms. Haltom spoke about the Richmond Fed’s “Rural Spotlights” project and how communities are finding traction.

Ms. Haltom said her organization is bringing data and analysis where it is hard to find. She expressed interest and willingness to partner with VEDP on this important work.

The Committee engaged in a discussion on opportunities for rural Virginia.

Chair Harrell thanked Ms. Haltom for her presentation and the Committee offered a round of applause.

Other Topics, Adjournment, and Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Rural Virginia Action Committee will be held in December, but the exact date and time are to be determined. The meeting adjourned at 3:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole David
Acting Recording Secretary